



A HYMN OF THE CROSS

BY · W · M · CLOW · B · D

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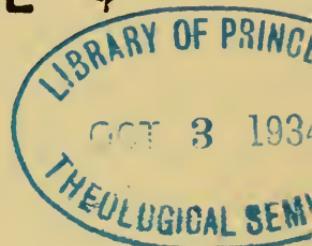
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A HYMN OF THE CROSS

A HYMN OF THE CROSS
BY W. M. CLOW, B.D. ♫
AUTHOR OF "THE CROSS IN
CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE" ♫



THE SILENT HOUR
BOOKLETS



HODDER & STOUGHTON

A Hymn of the Cross

"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."—
JOHN vi. 37.

ONE of the names endeared to Christian hearts is that of the Brook of Kedron. It flows softly, a little quiet stream, under the eastern wall of Jerusalem. When swollen with flood from the uplands of Judea it rushes down through many a gorge and chasm to join the Jordan. In the deep ravine through which the stream has torn its way—a gorge so deep that the traveller looks down many hundred feet over its cliffs—there is still to

The Brook
of Kedron

A Hymn of the Cross

The goal of
pilgrims

be found the monastery of Marsaba. Partly stuck like a swallow's nest against the cliff-side, partly cut out of the rock to which it clings, it is reached by a path, narrow and dangerous, along the ledges of the precipice. The whole scene is desolate and gloomy, and its stillness is broken only by the raven's cry and the jackal's howl.

To that lovely chasm, in the early centuries, when the ascetic life began to lay its spell upon devout minds, men travelled out of all Christendom. They longed to escape from a turbulent and tempting world. They were eager to live and to die in the land of our Lord. They lodged in the caves

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in the cliff-side, each one shut up in his own hermit cell. In the year 520 there came St. Sabas to spend his years in watching and prayer. He won the reverence of the scattered hermit folk who lived in the caves, and gathered them into a community. They built their eyrie-like nest, where it still stands, and it soon became one of the most famous in the Eastern Church. Ever since, the monks of Marsaba keep their vigils, and observe the customs of their monotonous days, in the monastery in the gorge of the Kedron.

St. Sabas

About two centuries after St. Sabas founded his community there came to it a famous scholar

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Stephen the
poet

and teacher, John of Damascus. He had fled from a too brilliant world, leaving behind him a great career, and a position of power, to live the recluse life in the Kedron Monastery. He led by the hand his nephew Stephen, a boy of ten years old. The little child entered the grim monastery and never left it again. For fifty-nine years he served under its austere rule, and his bones lie buried within its walls. Stephen is dead more than eleven hundred years ago, but though dead he yet speaketh. He was the poet of the community and the master of its choir. He poured his experience and his desire into a great hymn, a hymn of

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the ages, "Art thou weary? art thou languid?" Until the year 1862 the hymn lay sealed up in its Latin tongue. But in that year Dr. John Mason Neale rendered it into limpid and pathetic English. Like the broken box of alabaster, its perfume has filled all the house of God. Millions of men and women have sung it, to express their need, to confess their faith, and to lift up their hearts in love.

A hymn of
the ages

Now when we take up this hymn, we find it to be, like every hymn which has captured the Christian heart, a hymn in praise of Christ. Stephen of Marsaba did not know all that Christ had done. He had no wide view of the king-

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Man's supreme
need

dom of God. But he knew Christ. He knew what Christ can do for the soul. Into the words of his hymn he condensed the thoughts of his brooding hours on men's needs and Christ's power to satisfy them.

HE first thing Stephen sets down is his *view of man's supreme need*. That need is rest. The notable thing in human life is its weariness. We wonder at first that this monk should tell us that rest is the deepest craving of the heart. He never

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left his convent walls. He had no fear, as so many have, of poverty and its shame. He did not know the strain which the care of wife and child casts on a man. He knew nothing of the fierce warfare and pitiless competitions of a brawling world. His life had few distractions; it was a round of order and a routine of quiet. He spent most of his hours in the silence of his cell, and yet his message is to men who long for rest. But no man knows the human heart better than the monk. He lives his own confined and cabined life. But into his ear, in the confessional, the needs and sorrows, and the quenchless cravings of men are whispered.

The quenchless
cravings of
men

A Hymn of the Cross

Rest! Along these narrow and perilous paths in the Kedron ravine there came many a man who had tasted all the delights the world could give, and as he sought the cloister quiet his cry was "Rest!" He saw, year by year, men come, as Dante came to the little monastery on the hill above Ravenna, an exile and an outcast, with his unappeasable hunger in the deep lines of his face. As with Dante, when the monks asked the broken suppliants at the gate of their desire, there came the word, "Rest!" So this boy, who passed all his years within that lonely home, knew that when men unlock their hearts their deepest need is rest. As he grew

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to manhood, he learned what all men sooner or later come to know. The waters of unrest broke out in his own soul, as they do whether a man live in the sunless chill of the cloister or run eagerly in the world's meadows. I think I can see him, crooning to himself in his soft Latin tongue—

The waters of
unrest

“Art thou weary? art thou languid?
Art thou sore distressed?
‘Come to Me,’ saith One; ‘and coming,
Be at rest.’”

Is it not rest you need? Look round any congregation. Do you realise how many are broken, disappointed, weary? Let your thoughts range further afield. Have you realised how full the world is of men who are weary with its

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The sin that
scourges

burdens, languid from its incessant struggle, sore distressed because of the sin that scourges and humbles and defeats them every day? Call to mind the man whose face is flushed with pride, the woman whose eyes are shining with joy. Let them speak truth with you. They also need rest. Ask the friend, whose head is haloed with success, to sit with you, and as the hour grows late, and the talk becomes intimate, let him tell you his deepest need. He will have his psalm of thanksgiving. He will not belittle God's world or slander God's providence. But as he opens chamber after chamber of his heart, he will cry, "Ah, I need

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rest—rest from toil, rest from fear,
rest from strain, rest from life's fit-
ful fever, rest from sin." You will
find him ready to sing with you
Stephen's hymn of the ages.

Stephen's view
of Christ

*Look, in the next place, at Stephen's
view of Christ—*

" 'Hath He marks to lead me to Him,
If He be my guide?'
'In His feet and hands are wound-prints,
And His side.'
'Is there diadem as Monarch,
That His brow adorns?'
'Yea, a crown in very surety,
But of thorns.' "

 HIS portrait of Jesus comes to us from a monk's pen with a certain surprise. We would have expected that he would

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Come to
Jesus

have told us, what we often tell ourselves, that we need a new method of life, new surroundings, or new attainments. We would have expected that he would have called us to come to Marsaba, and wear its yoke, and learn its silence, and enter into its self-suppressing rule. This man lived a monk's life, but he had a man's heart. He knew that no method of life, no stern round of duty, no still discipline within the cloister walls could give men rest. He saw the deep despair on the face of the most merciless monk who kept his self-crucifying hours in the customs of Marsaba. "Come to Jesus," is his counsel; and mark, it is to Jesus with the

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print of the nails and the crown of thorns. It is to Christ who died on the Cross.

The master of
the Cross

Now, why does this man call us to Jesus, not as the master of the wisdom of life, not as the ineffable example of holiness, not as the leader of all seeking souls, but to Jesus as the master of the Cross? He had plumbed the depths of the human heart, and he knew that all unrest is but a symptom of a deep-seated disease. He knew that a man might have only a dinner of herbs, and few to call him friend, that he might be stripped of all that makes his days full of natural joy, and yet have rest. He knew that behind the faces of all those who

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The tap-root
of unrest

sought the monastery gates there were memories whose stains would not efface accusations of the conscience, red as scarlet, which robbed them of peace. There was the sense, in the finer spirits, of being out of touch with God. In the cloister and by the hearth alike, the tap-root of unrest is sin. A man may live in a garden of delight, and walk amid the envy of his fellows, and be rich in love and friendship, yet some unforgiven and unforgettable sin, some haunting fear of judgment, some half-stifled voice telling him of the low level of his life, or some dimly realised and secret sense of distance and alienation from God,

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may make his soul a troubled sea that cannot rest. It is not a teacher of sublime morality, not a radiant life of peace, not a master of self-denial with a controlling discipline that we need. It is a Redeemer from the guilt and power of our sin. Therefore Stephen holds up his portrait of Christ on the Cross. "In His feet and hands are wound-prints, and His side."

Our need of a
Redeemer

Mark the sources of your own unrest. Some sin whose sting is sharper than your thorn in the flesh, some discontent with your gifts and your lot, some habit which holds you in bondage, some passion which is checked only by custom or by fear, some distrust

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The method
of victory

of God and of God's goodness, these trouble our trembling hearts. Look to Christ on His Cross, and as you see not only forgiveness, and not only the example of your own endurance, and the method of your own victory, but the assurance of a love which, having spared not His only Son, will with Him also freely give us all things, you will find rest.

Look, in the third place, at Stephen's view of Christian life.

 HIS hymn, you will observe, touches the great things. It begins with a man's supreme need. It passes on

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to a portrait of Jesus. Then it
outlines the life of the man who
has found rest in Christ—

*The cry of a
brave spirit*

“ ‘If I find Him, if I follow,
What His guerdon here?’
‘Many a sorrow, many a labour,
Many a tear.’

‘If I still hold closely to Him,
What hath He at last?’
‘Sorrow vanquished, labour ended,
Jordan past.’ ”

Here the monk overcomes the man. In this cry of a brave spirit in the eighth century there is the echo of a false conception of the Christian life, from which we have not yet shaken ourselves free. Here you have that ideal of Christian experience which drove men into the cloister and made the

A Hymn of the Cross

What His
guerdon
here?

religious life a penance, a fasting, and a vigil. It is the foreshadowing of the teaching of the Romish Church, which deepened into the gloom of pre-Reformation days, and still quenches the joy of tender and submissive hearts. There is no more wistful, no more pathetic sight than a nun's face. "If I find Him, if I follow, what His guerdon here?" Sorrow? Labour? Tears? No! and again I say No! Sorrow will not, cannot be absent from any mortal life. Labour will be, and should be, a man's portion under the sun. Tears—blessed, relieving, healing tears—shall flow as long as we have hearts that can be gripped by pain and dead to

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mourn. But sorrow and labour and tears are not the gifts and rewards Christ gives to those who find and follow Him. Take up the New Testament. It is the sunniest book on which men's eyes have looked. Read the Gospels and you will live amidst the joy of friendship, and fellowship, and love. Follow the story of the Acts of the Apostles. You will hear the sounding of the trumpets of triumph all the way through. Take up the Epistles. They were written in the difficult years of the faith. They were sometimes penned in prison by men who were bound by chains. They came from writers who did not know what a day might bring

The trumpets
of triumph

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The Christian's
unsubduable
gladness

forth. They were sent to obscure men and women who had few sources of earthly delight. Yet how full they are of joy. How abounding they are in energy. One can almost hear the chants of these Christian folk as they sing their exultant psalms. Sorrow! Labour! Tears! The finding and the following of Jesus is the healing of sorrow, the lifting of the curse from labour, the wiping away of tears.

There is no life so full of unsubduable gladness as the Christian's. "What hath He at last?" asks this singer of our hymn, living in his monkish gloom. That is not the first or most vital New Testament question. "What hath He now?"

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is the question Peter and James and John and Paul ask and answer. "Now" is the great adverb of the evangelists of the Gospel. There is the gladness of redemption now. There is the joy of an entrance into a life of holy ideal and gracious liberty now. There is the elation of a faith and hope now which is the beginning and earnest of the pleasures for evermore. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." "Now are we brought nigh by the blood of Christ." "Now we are the sons of God." "Though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." We shall be patient

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Man's fear
of God

with this saddened spirit in its gloom, but let us be assured that Christ's guerdon and gifts are love and peace and joy, and that He gives them now.

In the fourth place, we have Stephen's knowledge of men's fear.

 **F** Stephen's cloister life shadowed his thoughts, and eclipsed his joy, it did not cloud his faith. But he knew how men fear, and fear God. He knew, as every preacher knows, how many listen to the gospel, and hear the call of Jesus with a sad indecision. Many men had passed along the ledge of the cliff, and

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entered in through the gate of the Kedron monastery, who had listened to Stephen's appeals with incredulous ears. Some wrong which was now irreparable, some hasty deed of those rude times which had marred their life, some disloyalty which still terrified them, barred the way to God. Nothing was left except the bitter thought that the head could never wear a crown of life. A dark fear of God kept them very really spirits in prison. To all such hopeless and darkened souls Stephen speaks when he says—

“If I ask Him to receive me,
Will He say me nay?”

‘Not till earth, and not till heaven,
Pass away.’”

Will He say
me nay?

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The doubter's
case

I wish I could persuade some one here who doubts the mercy of God, who fears and despairs for himself, who thinks that the child by his side may find and follow Jesus, but that he need not turn his face to Him, that there is rest to be received from Him who wore their crown of thorns. I wish that the man here who feels himself to be farthest from God, and is almost callous about it, would listen to this long-silent preacher as he assures them that God does not cast out any who come to Him. This hymn has led many thousands past their fear to Christ. It has won many victories. Let me tell you of one of the simplest that

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A humble
service

I have read. In a little book of essays written by Dr. Irenæus Prime, entitled *Along New England Roads*, he tells us that he went out one Sabbath evening to a service of song in the school-house of a New Hampshire village. Hymn after hymn was sung in a homely way. At length there came a pause, and a man's voice broke the silence. His prayer was short, simple in diction, several times ungrammatical; but it was heard, I doubt not, for it was earnest, eloquent, beseeching in its tone; the prayer of one who felt deeply the load of this world's weariness, whose faith was absolute in the promise of his Master, which he

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Give us
rest 1

cited: "Thou didst say that if we would come to Thee we should have rest. Give us rest, O Lord! Amen." Then there was silence again, and a woman's voice broke it. It was not a pleasant voice. It was somewhat nasal, a little sharp and shaky, and perhaps querulous in tone. She sang only a word or two alone; and then another, and then all the gathering joined her in that wonderful hymn, "Art thou weary? art thou languid?"

There was something very moving, very thrilling, in the utterance of the hymn by that group of country people. They were one and all men and women to whom

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life is the perpetuation of the curse—labour, for bread. There was all the eloquence of which the human voice is capable in the way they sang, with suppressed, inquiring, almost doubting voice, the questions of the hymn. There was a swelling triumph of assurance as they poured out the response of the answers.

He is sure
to bless

To their swelling triumph all English speaking Christendom can add their voices, and join in the harmony of even holier voices still—

“ ‘Finding, following, keeping, struggling,
Is He sure to bless?’ ”

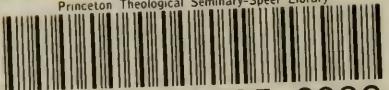
‘Angels, Martyrs, Saints, and Prophets,
Answer—Yes!’ ”

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